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THE YOUNG DIAMOND-HUNTER.

By ROGER STARBUCK.



THE BLINDFOLDED YOUNG DIAMOND-HUNTER AND HIS PARDS WERE WITHIN TWO PAGES OF THE EDGE OF A
DIZZY PRECIPICE.

The Young Diamond-Hunter.

By ROGER STARBUCK.

CHAPTER I.

THE DIAMOND.

"Did I see 'em myself? Well, I reckon I did, jist as plain as I see them ten fingers on my hands. They war scattered all over the field, as thick as pebbles."

The speaker was a tall man, wearing a bearskin cap, a rough woolen frock with a belt around it, and a pair of coarse canvas pants tucked below the knees into heavy boots, which had seen much service, although there was neither a hole nor a break in them.

The stranger—for such he evidently was—was the center of an admiring group of rough fellows gathered in front of Robert Jones' tavern, situated on the outskirts of the village of G—, Kentucky.

"Well, if you saw the diamonds, and they war real diamonds, as you say, why didn't yer pick some up, and bring 'em away with yer?" inquired a tall, lank individual, who had lately driven his team up to the tavern door.

"Yes," chimed in a short, stumpy man, with a pug nose and huge horny hands, "that's what I'd like to know."

"And how do you know I didn't?" he said, glancing warily round him. "Who shall say I didn't?"

As he uttered these words, several men with low-browed, hang-dog faces, covered with thick, bushy whiskers, who had previously shown little attention to the stranger's recital, pricked up their ears and evinced an interest, which caused him to seize the barrel of his rifle with a firmer grip.

"How d'ye know I didn't?" he went on. "It isn't likely, though, that I'd carry 'em about with me into such a place as this, where thar's lately been robberies and murders enough committed to make a decent man's ha'r stand on end."

"As honest a place as you'll find within the county," said Jones, determined to put in a good word for the place where his tavern was located.

"Maybe 'tis," said the stranger, "but that ain't sayin' much. Now my name is Nick Bend, and I'm from Georgia, and all I have to say is that I'm as poor as a church mouse, or was, until I found them diamonds, which is lodged safe with a friend, who'll send 'em on to me after I git home."

"When we see your diamonds we'll believe it," remarked one of the hang-dog-looking fellows.

"Do you mean to tell me I lie?" exclaimed Nick.

As he spoke his eyes were turned defiantly upon the speaker.

"And what if I do?" said the other, who was a sturdy, broad-shouldered man of middle-size. "If I do, I only express the opinion of the rest of them as have heard you."

"Do the rest of you take me for a liar?" inquired Nick, glaring round him.

His defiant look seemed to annoy all his auditors.

"Yes—yes, we do—we do!" came from half a dozen throats.

"Then I'll drive the lie down the throat of each of you, who, in his turn, will meet me outside."

The landlord here interposed.

"Let's have no trouble, gentlemen," said he. "We don't, of course, mean to tell the man he lies, and yet he cannot expect us to believe his wonderful story about the diamonds without some proof."

"Proof!" said Nick. "Well, there then, there's proof!"

And he threw upon the counter, a rough, bright stone about the size of a peanut.

Jones, who in his youth had been a lapidary, was a good judge of diamonds.

"Ay, ay," said he, as the crowd of curious faces were all bent toward him, "this a diamond of the first water! Why, that stone alone after being polished and brightened up would bring ten thousand dollars!"

Nick looked around him in triumph, as a murmur of surprise and admiration was heard on all sides.

Then followed many rapid questions, all of which Nick answered with ready promptitude.

"Why, man, your fortune is made," said one.

"I know it," answered Nick, "and I intend to take life easy hereafter. I have several of those diamonds in the bag I left with my friend; the others are rubies and sapphires. I brought away as many as I could carry from Arizona."

Among those who listened eagerly to Nick's wonderful story of the vast riches of the Arizonian diamond fields was a bright-looking lad of fourteen, called Amos Benton, who was employed by Jones as an errand-boy and waiter.

Amos was an orphan, and all that he could learn about his parents from Jones was that they had stopped one evening at his house, when he (Amos) was only a baby in his mother's arms, and had begged for a night's lodging, saying that they had no money to pay for the same. They both looked very ill indeed, having, they said, eaten some kind of a plant in the woods which they had mistaken for chickory, and which they feared was poisonous. Jones had given them shelter for the night, and after supper, they had gone to bed, but in the morning they were both found dead in bed, having died evidently from the effects of the poison just mentioned.

Having no children of their own, Jones and his wife had kept the baby, and Amos had grown to fourteen, a bright yet melancholy looking boy, chafing under the rough usage he received at the hands of his master, who had commenced treating him badly after the death of his wife, which took place when Amos was ten years old.

CHAPTER II.

CONSPIRACY.

Amos had listened eagerly to Nick's account of the marvelous diamond fields and their untold treasures.

A keen observer of human faces, he had noticed, after the stranger had displayed and then pocketed his diamond, that glances of a peculiar nature were exchanged between several rough-looking characters, who were at that time present in the tavern.

One by one the loiterers in the tavern took their leave as the hour of dusk approached, until only three or four suspicious-looking fellows remained.

"Do you want a bed for the night?" Jones at length inquired, addressing Nick.

"Yes," answered the latter. "I'll stay here all night."

The quick, bright eye of Amos watched the loiterers, and he saw them look at each other significantly. Soon after they rose and went away.

At last Nick signified his wish to go to bed.

"Come, you young rascal!" exclaimed Jones to Amos, "show the man up to his room!"

Amos lighted a candle, and motioning Nick to follow him, proceeded up stairs.

The stranger's apartment was on the second story near the farther end of a wide entry, in which were two windows.

"I hope you'll be comfortable," said Amos, as he opened the door of the chamber, and laid his candle on a small pine table near the bed.

"I reckon so," answered Nick, yawning. "I'm powerful sleepy that's certain, and no sooner down goes my head, than away I also goes in the land of Nod. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Amos, and he descended to the bar-room; where he noticed that the two hang-dog-looking wretches had returned, and were seated by the stove in the center of the room, conversing in low tones with the landlord, who, on seeing Amos enter, gave them a peculiar look when they immediately became silent.

"Amos," said Jones, "you had better go to the stable and curry down that mare."

This was an unusual order of that time of night, and the suspicions of Amos were at once aroused. He went to the stable, however, resolving to keep a watch on the movements of the trio he had left.

Then the boy glanced up at the windows of Nick's room; which opened upon the slanting roof of a kitchen built off from the main building. The candle still burned in the room, but Nick, doubtless, by this time was buried in deep slumber.

Being certain that the three conspirators intended to murder the stranger, Amos resolved that he would save his life if it were in his power to do so.

He stole cautiously from the stable across the back yard, to within a couple of feet of the window of the tavern, and peered through at the three ruffians still seated by the stove.

Determined to hear all that was said, Amos now glided into the back entry, and ensconced himself behind the door opening into the cavern, and which, not being closed, afforded him a good temporary place of concealment within a few feet of the conspirators.

"Ten thousand dollars don't grow on every bush," said Jones; "and if so be you'll do the job, I'll go shares with you."

"We've done many a worse job in our time—eh, Ben," said one of the ruffians, winking at his companion.

"Yes, Dick, so we have."

"This one, to my thinking, is easy done. Jones here has another key to the fellow's room besides the one he took. We can unlock the door, get in, reach the pocket, and if we find the diamond——"

"You won't be likely to," interrupted Jones. "'Tisn't likely he'd leave it his pocket. No, you'll have to wake him and make him tell you, under the muzzle of his own rifle, what he's done with that diamond."

"Then they'll have to be bloodshed," said Dick, "for, if I ain't mistaken, that fellow will show fight."

"Bloodshed be it," said Ben. "And now when shall we commence our work?"

"The sooner the better," said Dick.

"Wait a minute till I close up shop, and send that young whelp of mine off to bed," said Jones.

Quick as a flash Amos darted from behind the door, and gaining the stable, was soon busy with the mare.

"Amos," called Jones, a moment later.

"Well?" said Amos, looking through the stable-door.

"You may shut the stable and go to bed. Come, be lively about it."

"Yes, sir," answered Amos, a cold perspiration breaking out all over his body.

Would he be too late to save his friend—to save the life of Nick Bend?

Having closed the stable-door, he ran to the back of the kitchen; but just as he was about putting his foot on a vine trellis, by means of which he could easily make his way to Nick's room and warn him, he heard the voice of Jones.

"Halloa, there! Amos, where are you? Come, be off to bed at once!"

CHAPTER III.

THE WARNING.

Amos had just time to jump to the ground, when the landlord emerged from the tavern door.

"Off to bed, you little rascal!" he said, sternly.

"All right," answered Amos, and then, trembling all over with excitement, the boy lighted a candle and hurried up to his chamber, which was in the garret.

Breathless and panting, he sat down.

"What shall I do? What can I do to save him?" he muttered.

"He will be murdered unless something is done at once."

Suddenly a thought flashed across his mind. Chancing to glance up as he last spoke, his eye was caught by the open scuttle in the roof.

Could he not somehow make his way from this roof to the roof of the kitchen?

Yes, he could. There was the tin leader, a strong, thick one, which led directly to the kitchen roof, running across it ere it descended to the cistern in the yard beneath.

There was, however, no time to lose, so he quickly ascended to the roof, lowered himself over the edge, grasping the tin leader, and in a few minutes he was descending rapidly toward the roof of the kitchen.

Having reached it, he went to the window on the left, which was nearest to the bed, and cautiously opening it and entering the room, he advanced to Nick's side and shook him violently.

"What's up?" inquired Nick, raising himself on his elbow.

"You must be off," answered Amos. "There's a plot to murder you to-night. There are three in it. Hark! here they come, now, up the stairs. I hear them."

"Ha! ha! Say you so?" replied Nick, rubbing his eyes, as if to assure himself he was not dreaming.

Then he sprang out, rifle in hand, on the kitchen roof, dressed himself, and crouched down near the window.

"What do you intend to do?" inquired Amos.

"To have a pop at them rascals when they come in," answered Nick.

"No, no!" exclaimed Amos. "You'd better leave the place at once. It might only make trouble for you, as Jones could swear that you assaulted him first. Then I'd be brought in, and——"

"All right, youngster," answered Nick. "Sooner than git you into the scrape I'll let the scamps go this time, although my fingers does itch to give 'em a parting shot," saying which, they descended from the shed.

"Which way?" queried Nick.

"Through the stable," answered Amos; "there's a door at the other side of it."

Through the stable they went, and were soon many yards away from it.

"Well, my boy, I suppose you're for saying good-by," remarked Nick, holding out his hand. "You've done me a good

turn, for which I thank you with all my heart. If there's anything I can do for you, let me know it on the spot."

"There's one thing," said Amos, his eyes sparkling, "tell me the way to the diamond fields!"

The man stood still a moment, leaning on his gun and eying the lad steadily.

"Well," said he, "I couldn't direct you exactly so that you'd understand, but," pulling an old battered copper ring from his pocket, "you take this and go to Bin Bunks, the dwarf half-breed, give him this token and tell him Nick Bend gave it to you, and he'll guide you to the diamond fields, besides proving a good friend to you on the way."

"And where am I to look for him?"

"Well, I was goin' to tell you. You kin keep straight on till you come to the village of Weston, which is about ten miles from here; then go on along the first road you come to, which turns off to the right from the main road, running through the village. You will know the road by the stump of an old tree, which you will see near the corner. Follow that road three miles; then you'll come to a thick woods, and you'll see a narrow path turnin' off to the left. Follow that path, and after awhile you'll come to an old half-ruined little stone house. There you'll find Bin Bunks."

"I can find the way easily enough, I think," answered Amos.

"Perhaps you can; but let me give you a warning. You'll pass an old frame house in the woods, where there lives an old man, who keeps a powerful sight of ugly wolf-dogs, which he never has chained, and which may come out at you if you ain't keeful to give the house a wide berth. The old man is awful slow and is half deaf, so that them dogs might tear you to pieces before he could come out and call 'em off."

"I will take care to keep clear of that house," said Amos.

"That's right, but be keeful you don't lose your way in doing so. If you once git to Bin Bunks, he'll take good care of you. But, perhaps, you mightn't find him home. What would you do then—come back?"

"No," answered Amos; "if I once make a start I shall go straight forward, for better or for worse."

"I tell you what you kin do," said Nick, "you kin show the ring to his little sister, who will guide you to him."

Then Nick pulled from his pocket an old leather pocket-book, which had evidently seen much service, from which he drew forth ten bright silver dollars.

"There, my lad," said he, "there's enough to help you git some provisions for your tramp."

"Thank you, sir; but I don't like to take your money."

Even as Amos spoke, however, Nick dropped the coins in his hand, and, in another moment, disappeared in the darkness of the shrubbery.

The boy looked after him, then pocketed the coins.

"A good fellow," he muttered, "and now to prepare for my journey."

To do this, he must get back to the inn and contrive to enter unobserved, in order to obtain a satchel, in which he kept the few shirts and other clothes belonging to him.

As the back door was open, he thought he might manage to steal up to his room; at all events, he was determined to make the attempt.

Cautiously retracing his way, he gained the stable, whence, through the open door beyond, he peered at the back premises, and no one being in sight, he quickly glided to the house, and softly opening the back door, paused a moment to listen.

As he stood there, something came with a side-long stroke against his head, and he sank to the floor unconscious.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PURSUIT.

"What have you done, there?" said a hoarse voice, and a lantern was held up over the prostrate boy.

The person who had dealt the blow, was the ruffian who had been addressed as Ben by his companions in villainy.

"I b'lieve I've made a little mistake," answered Ben, looking up at the person who addressed him, and who was the landlord of the inn, "but who'd have thought it was your boy, prowling about at this hour of the night?"

"I'm afraid you've killed him," said Jones, as he stooped, putting a hand on the boy's temple, from which a stream of blood was trickling.

"Well, you see it ain't my fault. It was dark, and I thought it was that diamond hunter, the one we are after. Don't think he's killed, though, for I know by the way my club came down that it kind o' grazed him, without giving him a good solid blow."

"Well, we shall see," said Jones, as he lifted the lad, and con-

veyed him into the bar-room, depositing the senseless form on a bench.

He rubbed his head with water, vinegar, and brandy, and in less than half an hour the boy opened his eyes, and looked round him, somewhat bewildered.

"Well," said Jones, shaking him rudely, "how do you feel. Give us an explanation of your skulking down here in the entry, when we all thought you were in bed."

"Let me see," said Amos, clapping a hand to his brow, in reality to gain time, "let me see if I can remember."

"Well?"

"I remember now," said the boy, at last. "I remember hearing a noise, as if somebody was on the stairs, after I had gone to bed, and thinking that thieves had broken into the house, I slipped on my clothes and came down stairs to find out the cause of the noise. I must have fallen before I reached the bottom of the stairs. Wasn't that so? Didn't you find me lying at the bottom of the stairs?"

Now Amos knew very well that some person had struck him, but he pretended ignorance on this point, in order to blind his hearers as to his knowledge of the attempt to rob and murder Nick Bend.

"Well, come, you'd better go to bed now, and sleep off the effect of your hurt," said Jones.

Amos, glad of the chance to get away, rose and staggered out of the room, and soon reached his quarters in the garret.

Here he bathed his head, which still gave him pain, in some cold water, and feeling much relieved, threw himself, dressed as he was, on his bed, where he soon fell into a deep slumber.

He waked before breakfast, and rising, he hastily packed what few articles he possessed into his carpet-bag, and then softly opening the door, listened to discover if any person was yet moving about the house.

Not hearing any one, he glided down stairs, unbolted the back door, and made off as fast as he could go by way of the stable.

He had proceeded about a hundred yards, and was passing a clump of shrubbery, when he heard a rough voice calling out:

"Halloo there! where are you going, boy?"

He turned in the direction of the voice, and saw two men, who he at once knew were the two ruffians, Ben and Dick.

They were approaching fast, and the boy, therefore, deemed it best to take to his heels, so away he went, the two men following rapidly.

He was a swift runner, but it was plain that the men were fast gaining, when suddenly a thought occurred to Amos. He knew that there was a dry ditch not many yards distant on his left, so thickly overgrown with weeds and brambles that, if he could once get into it, there was little danger of his being discovered by his pursuers. The ditch extended some distance, and not far from its commencement another ditch, connecting with the main branch, extended to the left.

Into the ditch he plunged; then running on a few yards, he paused to see if the men had followed him. They had not; he could hear their footsteps as they went crashing past it through the shrubbery without perceiving it.

He waited a while, then emerged from the ditch, and there being now no sign of his pursuers, he moved briskly onward, elated with the happy feeling of independence and safety which now took possession of him. He had to walk about five miles ere he came to a public house, which he entered, calling for a slice of bread and butter, and a cup of coffee.

Having made a good breakfast, the lad, after resting about half an hour, continued his way, and being a good walker, he soon arrived at the village of which Nick Bend had spoken.

Passing through the village, Amos soon found the road branching off to the right, which he recognized by the stump of the old tree. He followed it according to directions, and finally struck the path leading into the woods.

It was a dense forest, seeming to extend for miles, and with thick shrubbery springing up on all sides between the trees, some of which were of lofty growth. Following the path, Amos kept a keen lookout for the house occupied by the old man with the ferocious dogs.

Unfortunately, however, this house being almost hidden by trees, Amos did not see it until he was within fifty yards of it. He then paused, hesitating as to the direction he should take so as to get around the house without being seen by the dogs.

While he still stood undecided, he thought he could hear a savage growl not far distant.

There was no time to lose, so he struck off to the left, and forced his way through the shrubbery in that direction.

Believing himself now clear of the house, he turned, hoping again to reach the path he had quitted.

He had not proceeded ten steps, however, when he saw the glitter of four eyeballs in the brush. Then two heads became

visible—two heads broad at the top and narrowing toward the mouth, looking like those of wolves.

The dogs had scented him, and with the intelligence natural to their species, had headed him off.

The lad drew his knife, determined to make a hard fight of it, but just then his glance rested upon a tree between him and the dogs, the branches of which grew down close to the ground.

With a quick bound he dashed forward; but as he did so, the dogs, which had hitherto remained motionless, rushed toward him.

Now it was a desperate race between the boy and the dogs as to which should first reach the tree.

Amos had just time to clutch one of the branches, when the dogs gained the foot of the tree.

The foremost one, with a low, deep growl, made a spring for his throat. But the ready hand of Amos descended, and the dog received the blade of the clasp-knife in its side. It sank to the ground howling, but in a moment it had regained its feet to clutch at the bottom of one leg of the lad's pants.

Amos had by this time swung himself on the lower branch, and as the other dog now made a spring at him, it fell short of its mark.

The wounded one, however, clung so firmly to his pants, that he made several ineffectual attempts to disengage himself from its clutches.

At last he succeeded by leaving a portion of the garment in the animal's fangs.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORM.

Having rid himself of the dog, Amos now clambered quickly up the tree, and was soon out of reach of the brutes. Here he sat watching the wounded one as it lay on its side expiring, while the other, seated at the foot of the tree, its flaming eyes turned up toward the lad, uttered deep growls of rage.

All at once, he heard a sudden rush in the brushwood, and the next moment six huge black hounds joined the others.

Here was a dilemma!

The lad knew he could not attack so many without being soon overpowered, so he commenced shouting with all his might, hoping that his voice would attract the old man to the spot to call off the animals.

But no one made his appearance, and, as he could see the house from his elevated position, he concluded that he was too far from it for his voice to reach the old man.

What should he do? Already the sun was down, and the shadows were growing broad and black around him.

The gloom was rendered yet more intense by heavy black clouds which were coming up in the west. A storm was evidently approaching, and, unless assistance should soon arrive, Amos must be exposed to the full fury of the tempest.

Again and again he shouted, but no response, no person came, and he leaned against the trunk of the tree, sad and disconsolate.

For several minutes he heard the wind sighing around him, and the creaking of the branches; then there came a deep crash, a heavy peal of thunder, and a vivid flash of lightning, which showed him the pack of dogs still seated at the foot of the tree, their glaring eyeballs turned up toward him.

Suddenly he heard a creaking sound, seeming to extend from the top of the tree to the bottom. There came a blinding flash of lightning, followed by a crash louder than any he had yet heard.

A bright ball of fire seemed to dance before the eyes of the youth, and to run along the branches of a huge tree on his right; then followed a splintering sound, and the next moment, with a terrific noise, over went the tree, falling to the earth.

Amos heard the dogs howl, as if in great terror, and then saw them scampering away.

The tree had been struck by lightning, and the shock having been felt by the dogs, had frightened them.

Amos lost no time in taking advantage of this circumstance, so he hastily descended the tree and hurried on through the woods.

The branches were falling all around him, and he expected every moment that some one of them would strike him.

At last he reached a gigantic tree, the trunk of which was hollow at the base, and into this hollow he glided to wait there until the storm had passed over.

The hardships he had lately undergone made him feel very drowsy, and in spite of the discomfort caused by his saturated garments he soon sank into a deep slumber.

He must have slept a long time, for when he waked the sun was shining down through the trees, the leaves of which, far and

near, glittered with the rain-drops, as if they were sprinkled all over with jewels. As Amos looked at them he could not help thinking of the diamond fields.

He left the hollow, stretched himself, and commenced to resume his wanderings.

On he went through the wet and tangled shrubbery, seeking in vain for the path leading to the cottage of Bin Bunks.

For hours he continued his search without success. Nothing but the pathless forest, stretching all around him, met his sight.

Tired and sad, he sat down to reflect on his desperate situation.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

Having rested a short time, Amos continued his way through the woods still unable to find the path he had left on the day before.

Nevertheless, the boy, who had a stout heart, did not despair. On he went, and at last he came to a clearing in the forest, where he distinguished a small store-house.

An exclamation of joy broke from him. Could it be possible that he had at last come upon the abode of Bin Bunks?

Tremblingly, he advanced to the door, and knocked.

At first there was no response to his summons; then a gruff voice demanded:

"Who's there?"

"Is that Bin Bunks?" inquired Amos.

"What?"

"Are you Bin Bunks?"

"No."

"Can you tell me where he lives?"

"No."

Amos turned, and was about moving away, when suddenly the door was thrown open, and a rough face was thrust forth—an evil-looking face—that of a man, apparently of middle-age.

"Where are you going, boy? What are you doing here in the woods? Are you all alone?"

"Yes."

"Have you any money about you?"

The manner in which this question was asked was such as made Amos shudder.

"I have a little," answered Amos. "Good-day, sir." And he started to move on.

"Come back," called the man.

The boy, however, moved quickly forward; finally he quickened his walk to a run.

He had not proceeded many yards, however, when he heard the voice of the man behind him.

"Come back, youngster, or as sure as I'm a living man, I'll send a bullet through your brain!"

Amos turned, and was horrified to see a rifle in the man's hands pointed toward him.

He paused, for he knew by the expression of the other's face that he would carry out his threat.

"Come back!" exclaimed the ruffian, holding his rifle still pointed toward the lad.

The latter obeyed.

The moment he was within the man's reach the latter collared him, and drew him into the cabin.

"Now, fork over," he said, "or you're a dead dog!"

Amos could at first see no way to avoid surrendering the money; but it flashed on his mind that even if he did give up his money, the man might murder him afterward to prevent his betraying him.

Glancing quickly round him, he saw there was a small, open window behind him, while beyond there were the trunks of several large trees.

He resolved to make an attempt to escape, and edged slowly toward the window, backing away from the robber as if he were frightened.

"Come!" exclaimed the fellow, "your money or I fire!"

And the trigger of the rifle clicked as it was put at full cock.

By this time Amos was within a foot of the open window, when, putting his hand into his pocket, as if to draw forth his money, quick as lightning he laid a hand on the window-sill, and vaulted through the opening.

So quick, so unexpected was the movement, that by the time the man gained the window Amos had glided behind a tree fifty yards distant.

"You don't escape me so easy, my fine fellow!" shouted the ruffian, and in another moment he was out of the house, running toward the tree behind which the boy had ensconced himself.

As he approached the tree, however, Amos suddenly ran to

another; but ere he could reach it the man discharged one of the barrels of his gun, and Amos fell to the ground with a low groan.

The man now paused, and turned round to see if any person had witnessed the deed.

He thought he heard a rustling in a clump of shrubbery not far off, and advancing to it, he peered behind it, but soon ascertained that the cause of the noise was only a squirrel, which ran away into the depths of the forest.

"And now to see what the boy has about him, after which I must bury the body," muttered the man.

He turned, and perceived, to his surprise and consternation, that the boy's body was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

A RUSE.

The disappearance of Amos was not long a mystery to the woodman. He now comprehended that the lad had played him a trick—had fallen down groaning, pretending he was hit, to prevent his firing the other barrel of the gun, as well as to gain time.

The ruse had succeeded beyond the lad's most sanguine expectations. Not only had the man paused, but he had also turned to examine the clump of shrubbery, and this had given the boy a good chance to escape.

Springing to his feet he ran, making as little noise as possible, directly behind the stone house.

In reality he was not more than ten feet from the robber, who, however, as Amos had intended he should, believed he had gone straight forward, and thinking he was far ahead, at once started in pursuit, and was soon out of sight.

"Good!" muttered Amos, as he rose and shook himself. "A narrow escape. I felt that bullet whiz close to my ear."

He now moved quickly away in a direction opposite to that the man had taken.

Moving briskly forward, Amos kept a keen glance ahead of him, hoping he might soon come upon the cabin of Bin Bunks.

He walked a long time, and at length, worn out with his exertions, paused to rest, where he heard a crashing in the bushes behind him, and, starting up, beheld a curious-looking personage.

It was a dwarf, hump-backed and bow-legged, with very long arms and fingers.

The two confronted each other, the dark, piercing eyes of the dwarf bent steadily on the face of the youngster, as if he would read him to the soul.

The dwarf was the first to speak.

"What are you doing here, boy? And how came you all alone in the woods?"

"First," said Amos, "let me say that I am in search of a person named Bin Bunks, and whom, if I am not mistaken, I now see before me."

"Bin Bunks is my name," answered the dwarf.

"And I suppose you know this?" said Amos, taking from his pocket the copper ring which had been given him by Nick Bend.

At sight of the ring the eyes of the dwarf lighted up with a peculiar expression.

"Know it? Yes," said he; "it came from Nick Bend."

"It did; he gave it to me."

"Then we are friends," said the dwarf, squeezing the boy's hand with the force of a vise. "What can I do for you? But, stay, before I ask that question, we will go to my house and have refreshments, for you look in need of them."

"I am, to tell the truth, very tired and hungry," answered Amos.

"Come, then, this way."

As he spoke, the dwarf, seizing Amos by the arm, helped him along with wonderful celerity, through the mazes of the woods.

A walk of half a mile brought them to the old stone house in which Bunks lived.

His knock at the door was answered by a creature so lovely, so transcendently beautiful that Amos drew back as if he had been stricken by the dazzling rays of the sun.

"This is Coral," said Bunk, by way of introduction.

Amos bowed.

"A poor boy," said the dwarf, "who has lost his way. He has come a long distance to see me."

"He is welcome," answered Coral, in a voice of the richest music, and which matched well with her personal appearance.

She was not tall, and yet, although her age could not have been more than thirteen, her form had nearly the shape of a woman's.

Bin shut the door and motioned Amos to a seat, but put no more questions until after supper, which consisted of some

dried venison, some corn cakes, and a jug of sweet milk, to all of which Amos, whose appetite had been sharpened by his long fast, did full justice.

When the repast was finished, Bin Bunks drew two stools by the window, and was soon seated by the side of his young guest.

"You have shown me the copper ring," said Bin, "and I have sworn to assist any friend of Nick Bend's to whom he would give it."

"You would know the ring, I suppose, wherever you would see it?"

"Yes; there's a story connected with it. Nick saved my life some years ago, and I said I would be his friend ever after. I gave him the copper ring, telling him that any friend of his who would show me that, would meet with whatever assistance it lay in my power to afford him."

"Well, then," said Amos, "I am bound for the diamond fields. Nick told me that you would guide me there."

"And so I will," answered Bin; "but it's a long ways off, and there's plenty of Injuns on the way."

Chancing to glance at Coral, Amos now noticed a serious expression on her face.

"Oh, brother," she exclaimed, "you are going where there's danger again."

"Yes," answered Bin. "I don't think I could live without seeing danger once in a while."

"As you know where the diamond fields are," said Amos, "how happens it that you have not made yourself and your sister rich, and given up your wild life?"

At this question such a singular expression swept over the dwarf's face that Amos was startled. His eyes seemed to bulge from his head, gleaming like red-hot coals of fire, his lips became white, and the veins upon his forehead swelled like whipcords, as he said:

"I must first shoot the wretch who murdered my parents and deformed me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DWARF'S STORY.

Amos remained silent, waiting for the speaker to proceed.

"Yes," he went on, "I might have been far different from what I am, but for a vile scoundrel of a half-breed, named Bendok, who, at the head of a horde of Apaches, attacked the party to which I belonged many years ago. My sister and I were journeying with our parents, my father being a Frenchman, and my mother an Indian of the Sioux nation, from New Orleans to this State. A few hundred miles from this place we were attacked by Bendok at the head of six Apaches.

"My father and mother stood before their children, and received the deadly tomahawks in their skulls. My sister and I started to run, she down the lofty hill upon which we stood, and I toward the edge of the height, where Bendok was waiting for me. He caught me by the hair of the head, and flung me from the height, at the foot of which I fell a mangled and bleeding mass.

"At that moment it seems a party of U. S. dragoons came riding up to the spot. They had already taken charge of my sister and saved her from the Indians, but for some time they hesitated to pick me up, believing I was dead. It was only the pleading of my sister that finally induced them to take me to Fort Johnson, whither they were bound. For many months I was confined to my bed, from which, however, I arose at last the miserable object you now see me."

"What motive had this Bendok for attacking you?"

"He had been a suitor of my mother, one of the most beautiful women of her tribe, and having been rejected, he had gone off swearing vengeance."

"He took a dreadful way of avenging himself!"

"Yes; and I, too, now have a mission of the same sort. I have sworn never to quit my present life until I have seen Bendok, and put a bullet through his brain. I was then but eight years old; and yet the face of that Bendok is as plainly stamped on my mind as yours is now."

"You say he is among the Apaches?"

"I don't know where he is now; but that he is tramping about from place to place among the Indians, I don't doubt, as he was fond of such a life. Yes, I would know his white face anywhere."

"White? Did you not say he was a half-breed?"

"Ay, ay; but there is no half-breed look about him, except his eyes, which are piercing black. You would not know he was a half-breed, were you to see him."

"Do you think he knows you are living?"

"I doubt it; for the dragoons informed me that the moment he saw them he mounted his horse, and dashed away."

Then Bin arose, and entering another apartment, soon reappeared with a fine rifle.

"That," said he, "was taken by me from Gray Hawk, an Indian chief. We were fifty yards from each other, and both fired at once. His bullet passed through the top of my cap, and mine through his skull. You have never been fired at? Do you think you could stand fire? You are rather young for that."

"I have been fired at, and that lately," answered Amos.

In a few words he told his story.

"It must be a new-comer," said Bin, "as that house where you say he lives has been unoccupied for a number of years. I must pay the fellow a visit some time, and get him out of the place."

Amos looked in surprise at the dwarf as he spoke. It seemed to the boy that this ungainly person was no match for the herculean robber whom he had encountered.

"Well," continued Bin, "as you are to be my companion on a long and perilous journey, I would first like to try your nerve, so that I may know how far I can depend on you in case of a scrimmage."

"My nerve?"

"Yes. You must stand up and hold a target."

At this Amos drew back. He had never seen Bin's skill with the rifle tested, and therefore did not know whether he was a good or bad shot.

"I don't think I understand you."

"Well, then, I want you to stand a hundred yards from me, holding out that copper ring you showed me at arm's length, when I will put a bullet through it."

Amos turned pale:

"That's a hard trial," said he.

"Have no fear," answered Bin, "I will send the bullet through the ring. You will see where the bullet will have just grazed the inside of it."

Still the boy half shrank from the task, when, glancing up, he saw the soft eyes of Coral darting glances of encouragement toward him.

"Very well," he said, firmly. "I will do it."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, any time."

"Come, then."

Rifle in hand, the dwarf darted out of the house.

"Now move on," said he, "and I will tell you where to stand."

Amos did as requested, and when he had proceeded about a hundred yards, Bin told him to halt, face about, and hold out the ring.

This the lad did. He then noticed that Coral stood in the open door-way, looking smilingly toward him. Up went Bin's rifle to his shoulder. He took quick aim, and the sharp report of the weapon rang through the woods.

CHAPTER IX.

A WONDERFUL SHOT.

Amos, who had stood motionless and firm, felt for an instant a peculiar thrill through one of the fingers holding the ring.

Then he looked at the latter, and, to his surprise, perceived, by the grazed appearance of the inside, that the bullet had really been directed with such unerring accuracy as to pass through the bauble.

"I never saw such a shot before!" he exclaimed, with true boyish animation, as he advanced toward Bin, who stood, coolly leaning on his rifle.

The dwarf held out his hand.

"Good stuff, boy," said he. "I see I can depend on you."

"I was rather backward about it at first," answered the lad.

"I must own I felt a little nervous."

"Natural enough," said Bunks. "In fact, I hardly expected, young as you were, you'd have nerve enough to withstand the trial."

They sat up until a late hour, Bin Bunks beguiling the time with trapper and Indian stories, many of which Amos found very interesting.

Finally came the time for retiring, and the dwarf pointed out to Amos his bed—a pile of deer-skins in a corner of one of the rooms.

The boy now bade his friends good-night, and threw himself, without undressing, on the bed of deer-skins, which proved an acceptable couch.

He sank at once into a deep slumber.

When he awoke the sun was shining brightly into the window, and Bin had just entered to rouse the youthful sleeper.

"Come, my young friend, breakfast is ready; let us get ready to start."

The boy was soon up, and when breakfast was finished, Bin led him outside.

"There are our traps," said he, pointing to two rifles and a large leather knapsack.

At about eight o'clock Bin locked up the stone house, and away went the little party, the dwarf leading the way, while Coral and Amos walked side by side.

At about noon they reached the borders of the forest, where they paused in a shady place by the bank of a clear running stream, to partake of dinner.

An hour's rest was then indulged in, after which they continued their way.

At night they made another pause, when, for the first time in his life, Amos slept on a deer-skin, with no covering between him and the clear blue sky.

He slept soundly, and waked to see Coral and Bin preparing breakfast.

For three days the party continued on their journey without meeting with any adventure worth recording, when they found themselves on the banks of the Mississippi River.

Bin led the way along the bank about a mile, when they came to a hut, in which the dwarf stated there lived an old boatman, who would take them across.

Bin knocked at the door, but received no answer.

"Very strange," said he.

They waited a long time, but the boatman not making his appearance, Bin walked round and looked through a back window, when he uttered an exclamation which drew his companions to the spot.

On looking through the window they saw stretched on the floor, his throat cut from ear to ear, the corpse of old Rook, the boatman.

Bin forced open the window, entered and examined the body. There was, however, no clue to show the author of the foul deed. The bricks around the fire-place, however, were raised, and a small hole was visible, which Bin examined intently, and then left the hut.

"I have heard it reported, though I never knew whether to believe it or not, that Rook had concealed in the hut a bag of gold dust, which he had procured from California years ago. The hole shown by the lifting of those bricks is of a shape showing that a leather or some other kind of bag had rested there for a long time. Some outlaw, who had heard of the treasure, doubtless resolved to possess himself of it, and for that purpose murdered him."

"Are there many outlaws in this part of the country?" inquired Amos.

"Plenty of them, on the other side of the river."

"What are you going to do about that body?"

"I am going to the nearest magistrate, who lives about nine miles from here, and tell him."

"No, no," said Coral, "you must not do that. He will suspect you are the murderer."

"I did not think of that. Well, I suppose we will have to leave the dead man where he is and proceed on our way. He will be discovered in a day or two, as there's a mail-coach which stops every week at his hut."

"How can we now cross the river?" inquired Amos.

"We will have to go farther down, where there are plenty of trees, with which we can make a raft."

They soon reached the woods, and the raft was made in a short time, of some stout pine trees, cut down by the hatchet which Bin carried in his belt, and fastened together by tough wythes.

CHAPTER X.

ACROSS THE RIVER.

Bin now procured three strong poles, with which the party soon pushed the raft along on its way.

As these poles were very long, they struck bottom when the raft was even in the middle of the river, so that the party was enabled to push the floating logs all the way across.

When they gained the opposite bank they struck off in a south-westerly direction.

Night had fallen, and having halted in a clearing, they prepared for repose.

"I should like to know who murdered old Rook," said Bin, "as I should not rest until I had brought him to justice for it. Rook was an old friend of mine, and I should feel——"

Ere he could conclude the sentence, the sound of trampling feet was heard in the brushwood beyond the clearing. Bin sprang to his feet, and Amos also arose, and seeing the dwarf grasp his rifle, the boy did the same.

Just then a party of about eleven men emerged from the brush.

"Surrender!" cried one of them in a deep voice.

"Why should we surrender? What do you mean?" questioned Bin.

"We want no detectives here," was the response.

Meanwhile the men continued to advance, all well armed, and several presenting pistols.

"These are robbers," said Bin, "and they take us for detectives. I have no doubt they are the murderers of Rook. We are not detectives," he added aloud to the advancing party, "so you may as well allow us to proceed on our way."

"If you are not detectives, tell us where you are going?" said the same person who had spoken before.

"We are going on a south-west tramp," answered Bin.

"What for?"

"After buffalo skins," answered Bin.

The men, however, drew nearer, and closed round the three, so that resistance was useless.

"You can't come that game over us," said he, who seemed to be the leader of the party. "You must go with us, at any rate, until we can find out for certain if you are detectives. We will have to blindfold you."

"We will have to submit," whispered Bin to Amos, "but try to keep as close to me as you can. There may be a chance for us to escape."

"All right," whispered Amos in return.

The three were soon blindfolded, and the arms of the two men taken away from them.

Coral had turned pale as the captors closed round her and her companions, but she had now recovered her fortitude, and calmly submitted to have a bandage placed over her eyes.

"Forward!" came the voice of the leader, and the whole band moved off at a quick pace.

It seemed to Bin as if they followed many windings and turnings, and he soon became aware that they were passing through a deep forest. Then they began to ascend what seemed to be a steep mountain, and then gradually the surface of the ground seemed to become level again.

All at once Bin's quick senses told him that the men, instead of being arranged as they had been—a portion behind the prisoners and another party in front—had now placed themselves on each flank. Why was this?

The dwarf was a quick reasoner, but he vainly puzzled himself to arrive at some conclusion on this point.

"Go on!" said the leader of the party, addressing Bin, who had slightly slackened his pace, "if you don't move faster, and keep it up, I'll put a bullet through your head!"

Bin quickened his pace, but he had not moved twenty steps, when he felt a rush of cold air on his face.

A sudden thought flashed like lightning on his mind, and he turned a shade paler and clenched his teeth.

"Amos," he whispered, quickly to the boy, who was by his side, with Coral on his left, "when we have gone six paces farther, turn to the right, dash off your bandage, and make off as fast as you can go!"

"Then we will be shot!" said Amos, in surprise.

"Never mind. I tell you death is ten paces before us!"

"No talking there!" shouted the robber-chief, sternly. "What do you find to talk about?"

"I did not know you prohibited us from speaking," said Bin, calmly. "I was telling my companion that I hoped we were near the end of our journey."

"You are near the end of it!" said the chief, in a peculiar tone, at which Bin was certain he could detect sounds of suppressed laughter among the rest of the outlaws.

"If that is all you were talking about," continued the man, "you are welcome to talk."

Bin then turned to Coral and delivered the same order he had given to Amos.

"Oh, brother!" whispered the poor girl, trembling all over, "there'll be no hope for us. We will be shot the moment we start."

"It is quite dark," said Bin; "at any rate, there cannot be much moonlight, and there may be a chance for our lives if we run. If we keep on we will meet our death six or seven paces ahead!"

The outlaws seemed in good spirits, chatting and laughing among themselves as they had not hitherto done since they started, when gradually they ceased talking. At the same time it was noticed by their blindfolded prisoners that the pace of their guards suddenly slackened.

Why was this?

Bin alone seemed to guess the terrible reason, and when he and his two companions had moved three paces farther, he suddenly said:

"Now! Off with your bandages, turn to the right, and run for your lives!"

The three lifted their bandages at once to behold themselves

within two paces of the very edge of the dizzy mountain precipice. A few more steps, and they must have walked over it to be dashed to pieces hundreds of feet below.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RUN FOR LIFE.

Coral and Amos now understood the meaning of the warning the dwarf had given them. They lost no time in obeying his directions, but started at once, dashing off to the right, Bin following and encouraging them to greater speed.

They were now running down a steep declivity, along which there was a narrow path between brambles and bushes.

So sudden had been their movements, that their captors were for a moment held mute and motionless with surprise.

Soon they recovered themselves, when a volley of bullets whistled over the heads and about the ears of the fugitives.

"On!" shouted Bin, "on for your lives!"

The tramp of the outlaws in pursuit was now heard.

The fugitives now dashed on, Amos with difficulty keeping up with them, for Coral could run almost as fast as her brother.

Suddenly the boy felt himself descending. Down, down he went, and they knew no more!

When consciousness returned he found himself lying in a deep gully, with walls of rock rising on each side of him. He rose to a sitting posture, rubbed his eyes, and endeavored to collect his scattered thoughts.

At last all was made perfectly clear to his mind, and, wondering what had become of Coral and her brother, he looked about him for some means of escape from his position.

The moon was shining brightly into the gully, faintly lighting the sides of the rock, which seemed to present a surface so smooth and perpendicular that he could not hope to climb them.

A feeling of gloom took possession of him, but suddenly a glad thought entered his mind. Coral and Bin must have noticed his fall, but, running from the outlaws as they then were, they could not of course have stopped to help him then. But perhaps, if they escaped their pursuers, which he had no doubt they would do, they would come back and contrive to get him out of the gully.

So he sat down on a shelf of rock, waiting patiently for dawn, which came at last, enabling him the better to note the unpromising appearance of the rocks on each side of him.

Parched with thirst and hungry, he sat with his face bowed on his hands, when he fancied he heard a faint trickling sound. He raised his head and listened intently.

Yes, there it was again, the noise of falling water.

Eagerly he walked about his narrow prison, carefully inspecting the rocks, to at last discover a small crevice, down which the water fell in small, sparkling drops.

"Thank Heaven!" muttered the boy, "I can at least obtain good pure water here."

He stooped and sipped from the little spring until his thirst was quenched, and he felt his spirits rise within him.

Hour after hour passed. The sun was high in the heavens, and the red light streamed down, tinting the rocks and the blue sky. Suddenly the boy heard footsteps.

"They are coming," he said.

The steps drew nearer, but it now struck him that they were too numerous for his friends.

What if it was the outlaws come back, and what if they should discover him?

He looked about him for some hiding-place, and at length discovered a narrow opening in one side of the rock with a rocky projection, behind which, and peering from his hiding-place, he could make out the forms of the outlaws, as they came in sight, moving through the brush.

Soon they gained the edge of the gully, along which they moved, speaking in tones loud enough to reach the lad's ears.

"Yes," one of them, evidently the robber chief, was saying, "I'm sure I caught sight of them in the woods just as we reached the edge, and where we fired I think one of them dropped, although we could not find the body."

Amos here lifted his bowed head, when he noticed that the outlaws had paused on the edge of the gully, and were peering into it curiously.

"It is a hat," said one.

"Yes," exclaimed another, "lying right there at the bottom of the gully."

"The question is, how did it come there?" said the chief.

Amos drew yet farther back in the rocky alcove, and a cold sensation of dread and consternation crept through his frame.

"Now I think of it," said the man who had spoken before. "There were but two when we reached the edge of the woods, although when we started there were three ahead of us."

"True, there must be some person down there, and who can it be except one of those rascals," remarked the chief. "Halloa, there!" he added, raising his voice; "come out from behind that rock. Your hiding away will do you no good, as we know you are there, and it will only be the worse for you if you don't come out."

For a moment horror seized the mind of Amos, but then he comprehended that the robber only pretended that he saw him in hopes of drawing him out, so he remained motionless, carefully screened behind the rock.

"I'll go down there," said one of the men, "if you say so, and make a search."

"But how will we get you out?" inquired the chief; "we have no rope."

A consultation was now held, when the chief's voice was heard.

"Yes," he said, "I am in a hurry to get back to our cave this morning with at least half the men. Two of you can remain here as a guard; and mind you keep a careful watch on the gully until I send back a man with a rope."

"Ay, ay!" was the response.

The chief then picked out such of the men as he wished to take with him, leaving two to watch the gully.

Amos breathed a sigh of relief, for though there seemed no hope for his escape, yet there was some relief in seeing only two men watching the gully instead of eleven.

At last, after the lapse of an hour, he beheld the man whom the chief had sent coming with the rope, and now gave himself up as lost.

The rope was secured by one end to a projecting spur of rock, leaving the other end dangling down into the gully, and one of the men was just in the act of descending, when another, seeming to notice some object in the distance, exclaimed:

"A prize, men! a prize! Yonder is a bear!"

In an instant the attention of the party was directed to the quarter pointed out.

"Yes, a black bear!" cried another one of the men, and the whole three, in their eagerness to get a shot at the beast, forgot all about the gully and its occupant.

Away they went, each one eager to obtain the first shot at the animal.

Amos now saw his chance. He ran quickly to the rope, and commenced ascending it with the agility of a cat.

When he arrived at the top of the gully he looked about him, and seeing the tops of the outlaws' hats about a hundred yards distant, half crouching, he ran along at his topmost speed, until he reached the woods at the foot of the declivity.

Here he kept on, hurrying along at his utmost speed, every now and then glancing behind him to ascertain, if his escape had yet been discovered by the robbers, and if they were in pursuit.

But he saw no sign of them, although far in the distance an occasional shot was heard, intimating they were still interested in capturing the bear.

Amos halted at last, seating himself at the foot of a tall tree, and his late exertions having told upon him, ere he was aware of it, his eyes closed in slumber.

He was awakened by a heavy trampling among the bushes, and he opened his eyes to behold an unexpected sight.

Right in front of him, glaring upon him with eyes like coals of fire, with tongue protruding, he beheld a huge black bear.

CHAPTER XII.

A PERILOUS SITUATION.

Startled by this apparition, Amos could neither move nor speak.

He rubbed his eyes in the faint hope that he was still dreaming, but he was soon convinced of the terrible reality of his situation; for, with a growl, the beast now came rushing toward him.

Quick as lightning he darted behind the tree, just in time to escape the infuriated animal, which, with a growl of baffled rage, made desperate efforts to reach its intended victim.

Amos, however, running round and round the tree, contrived to elude his enemy, whose little eyes blazed like globes of fire, while its growls of rage were frightful to hear.

Suddenly the boy's feet struck against a protruding root, and being unable to recover himself, he fell upon his knees.

Ere he could rise, the bear rushed toward him, and, in another moment, its sharp fangs would have been fastened upon his neck, but a whirling sound was now heard, and down went the bear with a howl of mingled rage and pain, at the feet of Amos, a hatchet buried in its brain.

He who had hurled the weapon was, the next minute, upon the bear, dispatching the creature with a few well-directed blows.

and as the beast fell dead upon its side, the victor turned to Amos, who beheld himself face to face with Bin Bunks, the dwarf.

"Just in time," said Bin. "In another second that rascal would have made an end of you."

"I am so glad to see you again," said Amos, as he shook hands with the dwarf. "But where is Coral?"

"There she is," said Bin, pointing behind him.

Amos looked in the indicated direction, to see Coral, as lovely as ever, standing on an eminence not far distant.

"I am glad you both escaped the robbers," said Amos. "You must have had a hard run of it."

"We did; and it was only by crouching down in a hollow in the ground that we eluded them. Not supposing we were there, they passed us. And now let me hear about your adventures since we parted."

In a few words Amos now related his fall into, and escape from, the gully, after which, all feeling hungry, and in want of refreshment, the dwarf went to work, cutting up the bear skillfully and expeditiously, providing himself with the better part of the animal.

"Now for a fire," said he. "We must go down in a valley, so that the smoke may not be seen very far off."

They entered a valley a few minutes later, where, with some dry brush and other stuff, gathered in the vicinity, they soon had a good fire.

An hour later all the meat was well roasted and they ate heartily, slaking their thirst at a spring a few yards distant.

"Now, then, for the village," said Ben, after they had rested several moments.

After they had finished and rested a little, they were soon on their way to a village close by, where they arrived at about noon.

Two good rifles and plenty of ammunition were purchased, with a couple of capacious leather haversacks.

They remained at the village a few hours, during which they refreshed themselves with rest and sleep; then they resumed their journey.

"Now, then," said Bin, "every step carries us nearer the Indian territory, where we'll have good need of our rifles."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE MOUNTAINS.

A journey of four days carried them to the Ozark Mountains.

"We will have to cross these mountains," said Bin.

It was early in the morning, and the sun was shining with a clear radiance, dissipating the fog, which was seen floating away in small detached clouds from the hills.

The three had not proceeded far when Bin suddenly paused.

"Injins ahead!" he said, in a low voice.

"How do you know?" inquired Amos, looking vainly around him for some indication of the presence of savages.

"By that," answered Bin, pointing downward.

There Amos beheld a small piece of fringe of a blue color.

"That came off a moccasin," said the dwarf; "and it came off lately."

He paused a moment and glanced around him.

"We had better turn off here to the right," said he, pointing to a narrow ledge which led around the middle of a rocky spur; "there will be less chance of our being discovered."

They were soon proceeding, in single file, along the ledge, which was not more than a foot wide, bordering one of those deep, impenetrable chasms, to look down into which would have made the head of a nervous person dizzy.

Bin wearily glanced about him as he proceeded; and suddenly he paused, motioning to his followers to halt.

"Back again," whispered the dwarf, "we will have to beat a retreat."

"Indians?" inquired Amos.

"Yes, plenty of them. You can just make the outlines of their forms on that rising spur of rock ahead half-hidden by the mist. I don't think they have yet seen us."

The little party turning, commenced retracing their steps, when, glancing behind him, the dwarf again commanded a halt.

"They have disappeared from the spur, so we must have been seen," said he.

Even as he spoke, Coral, whose gaze had been for some minutes turned upward, pointed in that direction, and on looking there, Amos and Bin beheld a huge Indian warrior, gazing down upon them over the edge of a rocky rampart, about sixty feet above!

The moment the savage perceived he was discovered he uttered a wild whoop, which made Amos start and shudder.

The next moment the Indian was joined by two more, who, rifle in hand, also stood looking down at the whites.

"They can mean no harm," said Amos, "or they would fire."

"An Indian never fires when there is a chance to brain his foe alive with the tomahawk," answered Bin.

"But they cannot throw their tomahaws so far, at least not to hit us," said Amos.

The dwarf pointed ahead and behind them, when, to his dismay, the lad perceived savages advancing from both directions.

"We are hemmed in!" he gasped.

"It looks like it," answered the dwarf, coolly.

"What shall we do?" inquired the lad.

"We will have to move straight forward," was the reply. "Be ready with your rifle, but don't fire until I order."

The Indians ahead were now about a hundred yards distant, there being but three of them in this direction, and they, owing to the narrowness of the ledge, obliged to advance in single file.

"Now, my boy," said Bin, after going a few steps farther, "the moment I have fired you must do the same, taking aim at the redskin behind the taller one, while I proceed to reload."

Quick as a flash he raised his rifle to his shoulder, and fired.

The echoes of the report mingled with the yell of the foremost Indian as he reeled and fell into the chasm.

"Keep close to the rock wall!" shouted Bin to Coral and Amos, and the warning came not a moment too soon for the crack of the rifles in the hands of the Indians above their heads was heard, and the bullets, striking the ledge, chipped off some pieces of the rock.

"Now is your time—fire!" ordered Bin, as he proceeded to reload.

Amos raised his rifle to his shoulder, but ere he could fire, the Indian at whom he aimed discharged his piece, the bullet flying past the boy's temple, taking off a lock of Coral's dark hair.

At the same time a yell was heard behind the three, as the Indians in their rear came hurrying to the spot.

Amos now discharged his rifle, and the savage at whom he fired reeled and fell into the chasm.

"Well done!" said Bin. "Load again, and take the other one."

As he spoke he squeezed himself past Coral and Amos, and sent a bullet crashing through the brain of one of the red men in the rear.

This man, falling on his back on the ledge, greatly impeded the advance of his companions.

"Forward!" shouted Bin, turning.

Even as he spoke, the remaining Indian ahead took aim at the little party, but there was no report; his piece had missed fire, and the next moment the report of the boy's rifle rang upon the air, and the savage tumbled dead into the dark abyss.

"Good, again!" shouted Bin. "And now we must run for our lives."

They dashed along the ledge, and finally reached a slanting, rocky platform, down which they ran with good speed, until, panting and breathless, they found themselves at the foot of the mountain.

"This way," said Bin, as he moved to the right, and commenced reascending the mountain at a point some yards from where they had descended.

"Are we to go up again?" inquired Amos, surprised. "Why did you not keep straight on when we gained the foot of the mountain?"

"The worst thing we could have done," answered Bin. "The Indians must eventually have overtaken us, whereas by ascending this rock we may gain yonder rocky breastwork, behind which we can make a good defense."

The "breastwork" of which he had spoken was a long rock, running across the top of a steep, shelving platform, which would prove difficult of ascent. To gain this point, they were obliged to clamber over a slippery rocky boulder, and it was only with great difficulty that they accomplished this task.

Soon they were behind the breastwork, where, crouching, they heard in the distance the yells of the Indians as they came on in pursuit.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNEXPECTED.

"Now," said Bin, "we must remain perfectly still and not speak a word."

The pursuers were soon heard descending the mountain to the plain, where they paused, carefully scrutinizing the ground, which fortunately was too hard to receive the print of human footsteps.

A brief consultation was held, when the party separated into

two bands, one going off toward the west, and the other in an easterly direction.

"They have left us," said Amos. "I am glad of that."

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Bin. "In fact, you are never sure of a redskin. There are two or three of them skulking about, I have no doubt. We had better wait and keep quiet."

They remained a full hour behind the rock, and then Bin turned to Amos.

"Come," said he; "now we can reconnoiter. Coral can remain."

The two descended the rock, sliding down to the plain, and Amos was on the point of returning to call Coral, when he felt a rather rough pinch on the arm.

"What is it?" inquired Amos.

"Hist! not a word! Don't even turn! There are two Indians creeping toward us from behind the rock on our right! Do what you see me do!"

Amos retained his self-possession sufficiently to obey the directions of the dwarf.

Casting a quick glance out of the corner of his eye, he could perceive that the two Indians were already within a few yards of himself and his companion, firmly clutching their tomahawks. Still, Bin seemed to take no notice of them. Amos wondered at this, and was about to speak, when suddenly, as quick as lightning, Bin, whirling round on his heel, sprang at the foremost savage, and struck him a blow on the head with his rifle-butt, which laid him dead at his feet.

Bin had told Amos to do as he saw him do, but the boy, unused to Indian warfare, did not sufficiently regain his presence of mind to move a step until he saw the other Indian spring behind Bin, and raise his tomahawk to deal a deadly blow.

Then the lad, darting forward, sent the stock of his rifle crashing on the head of the Indian, who measured his length on the ground.

Amos, now mounting the rock, called to Coral, who during the scene we have described had remained, in obedience to her brother's directions, crouching behind the rocky breastwork, from whence she had witnessed the death of the two Indians.

They started forward, walking rapidly, Bin taking the lead, and keeping a wary eye about him.

Suddenly he paused.

"What now?" inquired Amos.

"Indians again," was the reply, pointing, as he spoke, to the half-charred embers of a fire.

"That fire," continued he, "was kindled last night. If I'm not mistaken, we are right on the track of another party of Indians."

"May this fire not have been made by the same party who attacked us up in the mountains?"

"No; it was made last night, and those who made it moved straight on, taking the route ahead of us. That proves it," he added, pointing to a single long blade of grass, which was bent downward in a direction away from the mountains.

Amos looked with admiration on the speaker.

"Your life must have made you very keen to discover such a fact by a single blade of grass. It would be a long time ere I could become so skillful," answered Amos.

"In your case," replied Bin, "it is not necessary, as you are not studying to be a 'trapper,' but simply intend to get diamonds."

"I hope," said the boy, "that we will get there with 'whole skins.'"

"If we do not, we will not get there at all," was the dwarf's answer.

The speaker now led the way in a southerly direction, and, moving on at a rapid rate, at nightfall they reached a small grove, where they paused for rest and refreshment.

"We will have to keep watch to-night," said Bin to Amos. "One never knows in this country when a redskin may pounce upon him."

"I will stand the first watch," spoke up Amos, with true boyish readiness.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WATCH.

Bin Bunks smiled at this prompt proposal from the lad.

"No," said he; "I will stand watch, as I could not trust it to you. You are too inexperienced."

"You will at least allow me to take the next watch," said Amos.

"No; I am sorry to say that I will have to refuse you."

As Amos looked rather sad at his request not being granted, Bin grasped his hand, and said:

"I hope I haven't hurt your feelings, my boy. We prairie men have to be wary and careful, and although I would put perfect confidence in you in a fight, or anything of that sort, a watch is very different."

"I am satisfied with your explanation," said Amos, "but I don't like the idea of your being up all night without sleep."

"That is nothing," answered Bin. "I am used to it."

Half an hour later Coral lay asleep near the spot where her brother watched, while Amos occupied a position some yards distant.

Several hours had passed when, through the darkness, which had now become intense, owing to the clouding of the sky, Bin detected a small, twinkling light far away in the distance.

He glanced at the two sleepers, and concluded to leave them and go forward to solve the mystery. That they would be perfectly safe during his absence, he doubted not, as he was sure there were no Indians near.

Accordingly he moved hastily toward the light, and in the course of twenty minutes, found himself not far from it.

He then discovered that it was a stick, having a lighted pitch-pine knot at the upper end, and the lower end being thrust in the ground on a small hillock.

Bin remained motionless. The truth at length flashed on his mind that this was an Indian ruse to draw himself and companions to the spot.

If so, his approach must have been already discovered. He glanced about him, but saw no signs of the enemy.

Slowly and cautiously he commenced a retreat, walking backward, and keeping his gaze fixed upon the hillock, from behind which he expected every moment to see the red men spring.

He had not proceeded thus ten paces when, with a piercing yell, three Indians sprang from behind the mound and darted toward him, their tomahawks gleaming in the air.

He lifted his rifle, took aim at the foremost, and fired with good effect, the savage tumbling dead on his back.

His two companions, however, kept on, and when within a few paces of him, both hurled their tomahawks with a directness of aim which must have brought the weapons crashing in his skull but for his dodging in time to avoid them.

Thinking that they could dispatch him ere he would have time to reload, the two Indians sprang toward him, and one of them grappled with him.

Both fell to the ground, and there a desperate struggle took place, which ended in Bin contriving to draw his knife, and plunging it to the hilt in the heart of the red man, who with a deep groan fell flat upon the prostrate dwarf.

Bin at once threw him off, and in an instant was on his feet, knife in hand, confronting the other savage.

This person was a mere youth in years, not more than nineteen, and as he stood glaring a moment at the dwarf, the latter could perceive that he was ambitious to distinguish himself by slaying his first enemy.

As the young Indian, who was first to make the assault, bounded toward him, aiming a tremendous blow at his heart, Bin quietly stepped to one side, avoiding it, and causing his assailant to lose his balance.

He went past him, and came near falling on his hands and knees, but regained his balance just in time to avoid by an eel-like, sidelong movement the knife of the dwarf.

A little more cautious now in his approach, he advanced slower, and aimed another blow at Bin, who knocked the knife aside with his own, and the next minute they grappled each other, both of them endeavoring to use their knives with good effect.

At length the dwarf hurled the youth to the ground, who in falling pulled the other with him, causing the dwarf to fall on top of him.

Here was a good opportunity for the savage. He made an upward thrust, thinking to plunge the knife into the abdomen of the other, and would have succeeded but for the steel plate worn on the belt around the waist of the dwarf, against which the point of the blade struck.

There was no longer any hope for the Indian. Bin raised his knife on high, and the deadly weapon sank down to the very hilt in the breast of the foe, who expired after a brief struggle.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISSING.

A moment the dwarf stood looking down on his dead foe, and then glancing at the torch, moved toward it, intending to extinguish it, but, on second thought, he concluded he would not, for if there were any Indians within sight of it their suspicions might be excited on seeing the light go out.

Reloading his rifle Ben hastily retraced his way to the spot where he had left Coral and Amos.

He could not mistake the place, as there was there a curiously formed tree, which could be recognized even in the obscure light now prevailing.

This tree he gained in due time, but although he searched all around it, he could discover no sign of either the young girl or of Amos.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered, staggering against a tree for support, "what can have become of them?"

Thinking that they might have waked, and missing him, have gone to search for him, he called them by name, but he received no response. Glancing downward, he thought the ground in one part presented a peculiar aspect, and on stooping down and examining it closely, he discovered that it was a large stain of blood moistening the grass.

For a moment the dwarf stood like one paralyzed. He had succeeded in one quarter, while it was evident that the Indians had done so in another. During his absence they had come to the spot, and had doubtless murdered or wounded both the young people.

Not being able to find either of their bodies, after a diligent search, he made up his mind that they had been carried off—the boy for torture at the stake—while their intentions with regard to Coral may even have been worse—most likely to keep her until she grew older, and then make her the squaw of some one of their chiefs.

As this thought broke on the mind of the dwarf, he sat down and rested his brow on his hands.

"There will be no time to lose," he muttered, springing up. "As soon as the dawn shows me the way, I must be off on their trail."

As soon as it was dawn he commenced searching for the trail. For nearly half an hour his search was without avail. At last, however, he noticed that in one place the grass had been very slightly pressed down. Beyond it was so short, and the ground so hard, that no impression had been left. From what he saw, however, he at once made up his mind that the Indians had struck off to the westward.

After partaking of a frugal repast, for he had fortunately kept his haversack about him through all his late adventures, he hastened on his way, walking with long strides, and at the same time directing keen glances about him.

He had proceeded about two miles, when he was obliged to pass through some clumps of shrubbery which, by the trampled down appearance of the bushes, convinced him that he was on the right track.

Proceeding on, he at length beheld far ahead of him a small piece of woods, in which he judged he would discover further traces of the persons he sought.

In this he was not disappointed. In several places the shrubbery showed signs of a party having lately passed through it.

He was hurrying on, when far ahead, hanging from the bough of a tree, he beheld an object which made him shudder.

It was a form which had evidently been hung up to the tree by the Indians after they had scalped it.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, "suppose it should prove to be Amos. I am afraid it is the lad. Poor boy, he little dreamed of the fate he would meet with in coming out here."

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISONERS.

When Bin, on the previous night, left his two companions to discover the source of the mysterious light, both Coral and Amos were sound asleep.

Suddenly the boy awoke. He had had a disagreeable dream, and now as he opened his eyes, he started up on his elbow, fancying he heard stealthy footsteps not far off.

He was sure of it, when, springing, rifle in hand, to his feet, he beheld the outlines of half a dozen dusky forms stealing toward him.

"Bin! Bin!" he whispered, looking around him for the dwarf, "where are you?"

There was no response, and the dreadful thought at once forced itself on the boy's mind that his friend had been slain; then he remembered that now on him alone devolved the protection of Coral, and he determined that the Indians should not obtain possession of her except over his dead body.

"Coral! Coral!" he whispered, gently shaking her, "get up and run away. I will remain to cover your retreat. There are Indians coming."

The young girl quickly opening her eyes, sprang to her feet.

"Where is brother?" she inquired.

"I don't know," answered the youth, "but I will protect you with my life."

"How many Indians are there?" she inquired.

"I don't know. I should judge there are five or six."

"And what can you do against so many? Come, we must both run, and perhaps in the darkness we may contrive to escape them."

"They are too near us," he answered. "I'll have to show what fight I can. Run Coral, run!"

Ere she could obey: the Indians came rushing toward them. Amos discharged his weapon, and knew, by the limping gait of one of the Indians, that the bullet had taken effect.

The next moment the savages were upon him, and he was hurled to the ground by one of them, who, holding him down, raised his tomahawk, as if about dealing a fatal blow.

Another Indian, evidently a chief, seized his arm, and said something to him in a quick, guttural voice, when the man lowered his weapon.

Amos then noticed that two of the Indians had hold of Coral, who in a frantic voice had been begging that the boy's life might be spared.

"Spare for now," answered the chief; "but quick make burn when get to camp."

The captives were then led off, and hurried along at a great rate of speed, which at dawn brought them to the small piece of woods already alluded to. There, tied to a tree, was a half-breed, whom the Indians had lately captured and left fastened securely, with two Indians to watch him, while they had proceeded on their way.

The lad watched the half-breed and the movements of his captors with a painful interest.

One of the savages, after a few words of command from the chief, advanced toward the captive, and dealt him a blow on the head with his tomahawk, which did not kill him, but put him in the most horrible misery.

He writhed, twisted, groaned, and screamed with pain, as the blood trickled down his face, and while in this condition he was dextrously scalped.

"This is too dreadful!" cried Amos, holding his hands to his ears, for his arms had not been bound, to shut out the screams of the sufferer; while Coral held her hands before her eyes to shut out the sight.

The Indians stood motionless, watching the agony of their intended victims evidently with genuine pleasure.

Just as the unfortunate youth was about falling, fainting, against the trunk of the tree, the Indians unfastened the rope which held him, and secured one end round his neck; the other end they threw over a branch, and then three or four of them pulling on the cord, they jerked him up to the limb of the tree.

A few struggles and all was over. They left him hanging there, and proceeded on their way.

Just before sundown they reached the Indian camp, which was in a valley, watered by a clear stream. The tents were of buffalo and deerskin, stretched on poles, in such a way as to render them waterproof. From these men, women, and children came the moment the captives were led into the valley.

The captives were led into the center of the encampment, and there, having been bound hand and foot, they were left to be taunted by the boys and women who surrounded them, gazing upon them as if they were curious beasts brought there for exhibition.

In about half an hour the chief made his appearance before the captives, and with that pleasure which an Indian takes in informing his intended victim of the fate in store for him, briefly stated that in the morning the boy captive would be burned, and the girl have to be the squaw, when old enough, of one of his tribe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STORM IN THE VALLEY.

As Bin Bunks drew nearer the dead form, swaying from the tree, he breathed a sigh of relief, for the figure he now perceived was dressed differently from Amos, and was somewhat stouter.

"I'm glad enough to find it isn't he," the dwarf exclaimed, aloud. "The redskins have made sure work of the victim."

Bin was used to such spectacles, but even he could not help shuddering.

"What blood-thirsty wretches," he added. "They cannot be far ahead, as that body has not hung there much over an hour."

He now proceeded more cautiously on his way than he had formerly done, meanwhile inspecting every mark, every sign, and thus, an hour before sundown, he detected, in some soft ground, the print of Coral's delicate feet, and the more heavy impressions of the coarse shoes of Amos.

He moved rapidly on, but had not proceeded three miles when he noticed that the sky was overcast, and that a heavy storm was brewing. He had entered a long valley between two ranges of

high, rocky hills, the summits of some of which were covered with trees.

The deep rumbling of thunder was heard at the same moment, and a vivid flash of lightning illumined the wild valley scenery.

Bin had noticed one circumstance which warned him to be on his guard. It was this, that the valley sloped beyond him along its whole length, and that it was watered by a deep stream or creek.

Now he doubted not that, during a heavy storm, this creek would overflow its banks, and would change into a roaring, rushing torrent, sweeping away everything in its course. The only way he saw to escape the torrent, would be to climb up the side of one of the hills.

About a quarter of an hour had passed, when, with tremendous peals of thunder and almost incessant flashes of lightning, the storm broke forth. The rain falling in a perfect deluge, the creek rapidly rose to a level with its banks, and just as Bin had concluded to ascend the side of the elevation on his right, he heard a roaring like the sea itself, and looking ahead, heard a vast, bubbling, boiling sheet of water, sweeping and booming along toward him.

"It is the torrent!" he exclaimed. "I knew it would come, and I must make good speed to get out of the way."

He sprang to the hill-side and commenced ascending, until he thought he had gone far enough, but the water having in its headlong career, reached a point opposite to him, it was there increased in volume by a mountain torrent opposite; the two uniting and swelling the torrent, it rose with a rapidity which threatened to overtake Bin ere he could get beyond its reach.

There was about a hundred yards above him a tree, one of the branches of which hung so low as almost to touch the ground.

The dwarf endeavored to gain this branch, and had nearly done so, when he felt the water trickling through his moccasin.

And now a new danger threatened him.

From the summit of the hill he was ascending the water was pouring in a double cataract, dashing against his body with a force which almost threw him off his feet.

Gaining the partial shelter of a rock, he dragged himself on, and at last reached the tree he was striving for.

Grasping the branch, he drew himself up until he had gained one of the other boughs, when he crawled in toward the trunk.

Looking down from his perch, he discovered that he was not a moment too soon. The water from the valley had ascended with redoubled rapidity, and was already a foot up the tree, while that from above, being added to it, increased its volume.

Meanwhile the storm raged violently, so that the tree rocked with a force which obliged him to maintain a good hold to keep himself in his place.

Suddenly he heard a cracking sound, half-smothered, as if proceeding from under the ground.

"The roots!" he exclaimed; "yes, the roots have given way in some parts, and I shouldn't wonder if the tree will go over in a few minutes."

Darkness was gathering around him, and still the storm raged with unabated fury.

He doubted not the tree would fall before morning, and prepared himself for a struggle with the torrent. Taking off his upper garments, he lashed them securely to his back, and then he divested himself of his moccasins, which he tied about his neck.

"At least I'm prepared," he thought. "I may contrive to save myself by catching some twig or projection of rock as I am whirled on."

Clinging to the tree, he remained watching the water as it swept on beneath him in a white, whirling, foaming mass.

Hour after hour passed, and Bin had begun to think that the storm might abate ere the expected catastrophe took place, when suddenly a tremendous blast struck the tree edgewise, away from the former direction of the wind, and down it went, falling into the roaring, foaming vortex of water.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN CAMP.

Just before the storm to which we have alluded broke forth, Coral and Amos were conducted to an empty tent. Here they were left, but they could hear the footsteps of Indians moving to and fro in front of their quarters, by which they knew that they were well guarded.

"Hark! What noise is that?" Amos suddenly exclaimed, as a rushing, roaring sound, drawing nearer, was heard in the distance.

"It is the storm," answered Coral, whose quick ear soon recognized the peculiar sound.

Soon the tempest came down on the Indian village, and raged with the utmost fury.

Both the boy and girl held their breath as they listened to the roaring of the thunder, and caught the sharp gleam of the lightning.

"If it were not that we are bound we might soon find a chance to escape?" said Amos.

"How?" inquired Coral. "I see no way."

"Hark! don't you hear the Indians' tents blowing down in all directions?"

"Oh, yes. Perhaps this one may blow down as well."

"Don't you think that, in such a case, we might contrive to creep off in the darkness and confusion of the storm?"

"We might; but I think it doubtful, as the Indians are sharp and vigilant at all times and under all circumstances."

"Yes, but they are now busy trying to put up their tents, judging by the noises."

"Not all of them, especially as the men have the women to help them."

Amos, with his elbow, now contrived to part the skin of the tent sufficiently to peer forth.

At first, owing to the darkness, he could see nothing, but a flash of lightning soon showed him the back of an Indian as the man paced to and fro.

He withdrew his head, and a feeling of despair took possession of him.

He sat, head bowed, when he felt the touch of a soft hand on his shoulders, and on looking up he saw Coral, who showed him her disengaged hand.

"See," she said, "the Indians did not tie my wrist tight enough. I have disengaged my hand."

Amos looked overjoyed.

"Hold your wrists near," she added, "and I'll try to loosen your knots so that you can slip them through."

This the lad did, when Coral, with some trouble, having only the use of one hand, contrived to loosen the knots so that Amos could slip his wrists in and out the nooses at pleasure.

"This is glorious!" he whispered.

Then he loosened Coral's cords, and the young girl sighed with relief as the tightness of the strands had previously hurt her flesh almost beyond endurance.

"Now we are both free," said Amos, when they had also loosened the cords about their ankles.

"Yes, but you must do nothing rash," she answered, "as that will spoil all."

Meanwhile, the fury of the storm seemed to increase. The wind shrieked and howled about the Indian camp, while the flapping of the tent-skins on all sides was like the continual discharge of platoons of musketry.

Suddenly the tent, in which were Coral and Amos, blew over, completely enveloping them in its folds.

The Indians on guard instantly commenced endeavoring to pull away the skins, but the wind now blew with such violence that their efforts were unavailing.

Meanwhile, Amos had contrived to crawl forth into the darkness, drawing Coral after him, and bidding her keep on his side, he got behind a large log, within a few yards of where the tent had been.

A vivid flash at that moment showed him a number of Indians gathered about the fallen tent.

Knowing they would soon discover their absence, they crawled away from the camp as fast as they could go, keeping as near the edges of the rocks as was possible.

Finally they emerged from the valley, and found themselves in a broad, flat country, with a dark patch of forest extending beyond. This they could discover by the almost incessant flashes of lightning, which also afforded them a faint view of the tents far behind them.

Suddenly Coral clutched her companion's arm.

"They have discovered our escape, and are on our track," said she.

"How do you know?"

"Just now, when the lightning flashed, I am sure I saw several dusky forms stealing along this way behind us."

"Are you sure?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied. "You can see for yourself by the next flash."

Amos waited until the lightning again sent its lurid gleam across the waste, when, glancing behind him, he saw the figures to which Coral had alluded.

"We must change our course," said he.

"I am afraid that will do no good. If we could only find a hollow rock, or a cave where we could hide ourselves, we might yet escape them."

"I see nothing of that sort about here."

"You are mistaken," said Coral. "A little ways on our right

there is something which looked to me like a log when I saw it in the last flash a few minutes ago."

They crawled toward the log, which they soon reached, and found, to their great joy, that it was large and hollow.

Into this they crawled, and lay perfectly still, while they heard the voices of their pursuers as they passed the spot.

"They will not find us," said Amos, exultingly. "They will pass, and we shall escape."

"Hist, not so loud!" whispered Coral. "There may be more of them to come yet; perhaps they are loitering near."

"Do you think they will look in?"

"I cannot tell. Had you not better look out and see if there are any more coming?"

Amos went to the opening and looked out.

A vivid gleam of lightning soon showed him there was not an Indian in sight toward the camp.

"Amos, Amos," Coral whispered, while he was still looking from that side of the log; "they are coming this way."

The boy returned, and peering over Coral's shoulder, he could see, by another flash, the Indians who had passed coming back.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE TORRENT.

The moment Bin felt the tree going over he clung firmly to the trunk, which was carried into the dark vortex of water, as has already been stated.

It partly floated, and was borne swiftly along by the current, until at last, the roots catching in some obstruction under water, the tree was held.

Bin's situation was now rendered more perilous than before; for the turbulent, rushing water striking against the floating timber, broke over it in high waves which washed against and above him, and at last swept him away from his hold, whirling him swiftly along, with a velocity that made his head dizzy.

Being an excellent swimmer, he kept himself upon the surface, although he was unable to stay his headlong career, which at any moment, he felt, might result in his being dashed against some protruding rock.

"I think I'd sooner face a score of red men," he muttered, "than find myself in such a predicament."

His only hope was that he might be taken beyond the limits of the valley, where, the waters spreading, he would be out of further danger.

A vivid flash of lightning now showed him ahead a sharp, jagged rock, projecting out into the water, and against which it seemed to him he must inevitably be borne.

He mustered all his strength and resolution to prepare himself for the coming shock. He saw that it was impossible to avoid the rock, as he was now being carried straight toward it; but he knew that the force of a shock under water is far less violent than one above. Therefore he determined, the moment he was within a few yards of the rock, to dive, when he would come in contact with that part beneath the surface, and, as a consequence, would suffer less from the concussion.

The darkness, save when relieved by vivid flashes of lightning, was intense; nevertheless, he could faintly discern the dusky outlines of the rock looming up through the gloom.

When within a few yards of the rock he dove, and, to his surprise, the shock was not even as violent as he had expected it would be.

On endeavoring to regain the surface, however, what was his dismay to feel his head come in contact with a rocky roof!

The truth at once flashed on Bin's mind. He had been drawn into a sort of under water cave, and there seemed no hope now of his escaping his doom. Vainly he endeavored to draw himself out of the rocky opening by seizing the rough projections in the roof, but the strength of the current resisted all his efforts.

He had, therefore, resigned himself to his fate, when feeling his limbs drawn by a suction force which he had previously resisted, and allowing this force to draw him on, he glided into a sort of rocky basin, where, to his surprise, his head emerged above the surface in a watery cave, under the hill.

He could see nothing, but he now struck boldly out, and soon found himself on a shore of rough earth.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he crawled out of the water and shook himself, "I would never have dreamed of there being here such a retreat as this. An excellent hiding place, in case one were pressed by Indians. If I had something to eat, I don't know but I might here pass the time comfortably enough several weeks longer."

The sides of the cavern, as he continued to ascend, he noticed were of ragged rock, while the ground was nearly the same as that outside on many parts of the hill.

As Bin climbed up, he fancied he beheld, ahead of him, two points of flame, gleaming through the gloom. A moment these were visible; then they disappeared, to reappear in another moment.

"It must be a serpent!" thought Bin, as he drew from his belt the long knife he carried. "I must be on my guard, as some of the reptiles out this way are poisonous."

He proceeded onward and soon was near enough to see the object which had attracted his attention.

It was a small, harmless serpent, whose head protruded from the skull of a skeleton placed in an upright position against the rocky wall. It had a peculiarly loathsome aspect, as its slimy body slowly receded in the eyeless socket of the skeleton, on the approach of Bin.

The latter made an examination of the skeleton. It had evidently been there a very long time, judging by its appearance.

On the ground near it, lay an old rusty sword of Spanish manufacture, a helmet, and a dirk.

Leaving the skeleton, he proceeded on for a further exploration of the cave, but found nothing more to reward his search, excepting that the length of this under-hill cavern was about sixty feet, while in width it did not exceed eleven.

He descended to within a few feet of the water-line, when he sat down on a stone, and as he listened to the dull, booming roaring without, which sounded like the knell of the little sister whom he so dearly loved, he thought of the deadly peril she was in, and longed for an escape from his present prison so that he might go to her rescue.

"If they harm a hair of her head," he muttered, savagely, "I will not rest until I shall have exterminated every one of their tribe."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE LOG.

Coral and Amos remained motionless and silent in the hollow log, watching the Indians as they approached.

The Indians, drawing nearer, moved straight toward the log; but, for some reason or other, it did not occur to them to look in. Probably, having been encamped in their present quarters but a day, they had not noticed whether the log was hollow or solid.

In fact, they passed the spot, hurrying on, evidently believing that the fugitives had moved ahead.

"Now," whispered Amos—"now is our time!" and with his companion he left the log, hurrying through the storm and darkness in a direction away from the camp.

They had walked about two miles when they heard the roaring, rushing sound of the water in the valley, where Bin had met with his mishap.

They kept on along the edge of the valley, until they found themselves near a rugged rock, when they paused, sheltering themselves from the storm in a hollow cleft.

Though her garments were drenched with rain, and she felt very uncomfortable, yet Coral was unable to keep her eyes open. She sank into a deep slumber, and Amos, in spite of his efforts to keep awake, so as to stand watch, soon imitated her example.

They slept until daylight, when Amos awoke, and as he rubbed his eyes and glanced around him, a shadow fell on the interior of the cave. Looking up, Amos was dismayed to behold the head of an Indian, which was thrust through the opening of the cave.

Without a moment's hesitation, and with wonderful presence of mind, Amos at once sprang at the Indian, and seizing him by the throat with both hands, bore him to the earth, and there held him motionless. Being unarmed, it was the only alternative left to Amos.

The savage, unable to strike a blow in his defense, lay struggling and kicking on the ground, while his adversary tightened his hold on his throat.

In a short time his struggles became more feeble, his eyes rolled about in his head, he gasped for breath, and soon he lay perfectly motionless—to an appearance, dead.

Amos, however, determined not to be duped, maintained his hold until, by the presence of the Indian's face, he was sure he was dead.

He then cautiously left the cave and looked about him.

As far as he could see, there was no sign of a human being. The Indian had evidently started in this direction alone to look for the fugitives.

Amos returned to the cave, just as Coral opened her eyes. Her glance fell on the dead Indian, and she sprang up with a low shriek.

"It is nothing," said Amos. "You can see he is dead. I had to do it."

And in a few words he related the circumstances.

"We must leave this place," said the young girl, decidedly. "There are other Indians not far off, for they seldom go on a hunt alone. I shouldn't be surprised to see them appear any moment."

Amos deemed it best to take her advice, so they were soon moving along the edge of the valley; but they had not proceeded far, when Cora suddenly clutched Amos by the arm.

"What is it?"

"See! there! down there!" pointing into the valley behind them, where the water had greatly subsided.

Looking in that direction, Amos beheld the heads of several Indians protruding above the rocks.

"You are right," he said. "We had better run as fast as we can go, and try to find some hiding-place."

As he spoke, he seized her by the hand, and they hurried along down the side of the valley among the rocks.

Cora uttered a half-stifled shriek as they ran.

"The Indians are after us," she gasped.

Amos perceived that she was right. There were the Indians running after them, ascending the side of the valley, so that they might get above them, and thus head them off, their yells of exultation breaking forth like those of fiends.

"They will capture us," cried Cora. "What shall we do?"

Just at that instant a whizzing sound was heard, a tomahawk passed within an inch of the boy's temple, and as he glanced up, Cora lost her balance, and slipped.

The boy looked for her, but she had disappeared, vanished like magic from his sight.

"Cora, Cora!" he called out, for the moment forgetting himself and the danger he was in. Looking up, he saw an Indian perched upon a projecting crag, his rifle pointed at his head, and instinctively he sprang from the shelf of rock on which he stood, landing on a bed of soft earth, so far under the crag occupied by the Indian that the latter could not reach him.

While the lad was reflecting as to what he should next do, his arm was seized from above, and the next moment he was drawn through an opening, while a well-known voice whispered in his ear:

"Whist! no noise!"

Amos recognized Bin's voice at once.

"How strange!" he said; "but she—your sister Cora, is——"

"Safe here with me," interrupted Bin. "I saw her when she lost her balance. She fell here on this bank of earth, and I caught her at once, and drew her in. I was going for you, when, fortunately, you saved me the trouble by jumping down right in front of the cave."

Soon as Bin spoke, Amos looked up to see Cora in front of him.

"What do you intend to do now, Bin?" asked the boy.

"I have been exploring this retreat, and have found an opening, farther down, by means of which we can make our escape. Meanwhile, for the present, we can keep the Indians back a little with this," pointing to a large rock near the mouth of the opening. "We can roll that over the opening, and they may be a long time discovering there is a cave here."

With their united efforts the stone was soon rolled against the mouth of the cave.

"Now, then," said Bin, "we will have something to eat. I have only a little left, and that got wet yesterday; but, such as it is, I have no doubt it will taste good to you."

Cora and Amos were soon partaking of the venison, which was indeed palatable to them after their long fast. While they were eating, they could hear without the voices of the Indians, who by this time had reached the spot in front of the cave.

They were evidently much puzzled to account for the strange disappearance of the fugitives, and were holding a consultation.

The rock which Bin and Amos had rolled against the mouth of the cave filled it in such a way that no person previously ignorant of the whereabouts of the opening would ever have guessed its existence.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUT OF THE CAVE.

When the fugitives had finished their meal, Bin led the way along the ascending pathway of the cave, and kept on until they were near the summit, when he made a sort turn, leading downward.

They walked a long distance ere a little, twinkling light was seen in the distance.

This was the lower opening of the cave, far down in the valley, near its extremity.

They emerged through the opening, Bin taking the lead, and

casting a keen glance about him as he passed through the aperture.

"No Indians in sight," said he, "and we can make good progress while they are trying to unravel the mystery of our disappearance."

They struck off toward the south and west, keeping on in this direction a whole day, by which time Bin had stuffed the haversack with the meat of a small deer which he had shot on the way.

They now arrived at a small village, in which they were enabled to cook their meat, and where they resolved to remain a couple of days to rest and recruit after their late prolonged hardships.

When they again set out, it was with invigorated frames and in good spirits.

They journeyed for several days without meeting a soul.

"In another day," said Bin, "we shall have arrived on the diamond fields, where you can pick all you want."

The boy's eyes glowed with delight; he clapped his hands in his deep joy.

The next day came. Amos was up early, standing on a high rock which he had been told would afford him a good view of the diamond fields glittering far and near with their wealth of precious stones.

Yes, there they were sure enough, sparkling in the early tints of the rising sun, as far as the eye could reach.

"Hoorah! hoorah!" shouted the lad, in his enthusiasm, "the goal is won at last!"

"Do you see them?" inquired Bin from below, looking up and seeming to enjoy the lad's pleasure.

"Yes—oh, yes!" was the reply. "Come, let us hasten there, and get all we can."

By noon they reached the ground, and Amos was soon busy raking in the sand for the stones which Bin pointed out to him as those he had always heard called diamonds.

The boy in the course of a week had washed out a haversack full.

"Now, then!" he exclaimed, with delight, "I am a rich man!"

"Are you ready to go back?" inquired Bin.

"Yes, why not? I have enough to enrich me forever, and what more should I want?"

So next day they started on their return, and in due time Cora, Bin, and Amos arrived in Kentucky without having met with any adventure on their journey.

"Now," said Amos, after they had eaten their parting dinner in Bin's habitation, "do you still refuse to share my treasure with me?"

"Yes," answered Bin; "had I wanted those stones, I could have picked them up myself, and any time I want them I can go and get them."

"True," said Amos. "It is still a mystery to me why you don't avail yourself of the chance."

"I have made a solemn vow never to touch anything of that sort, and only to earn just money enough to afford me a bare subsistence until I shall have found that hated Benedok, who murdered my parents."

They conversed a few hours longer on this subject and on similar ones, when Amos rose.

"I suppose you are anxious to go," said Bin.

"I am," answered Amos, "but I shall remember you and your sister with life-long gratitude, and I hope you will permit me to come and see you sometimes."

"With all my heart," answered Bin. "And now," he added, "when you go we will at least accompany you to the borders of the State."

"Thank you! thank you!" exclaimed Amos, joyfully.

They were soon on their way.

Toward sundown they approached the woods where Amos had paused after he ran away from Jones. As they drew near they noticed, coming along a road so that it would pass in front of them, a carriage containing a single individual.

"I should know that carriage!" cried Amos; "it is that of my former employer, Jones."

"And who is that person in it?" inquired Bin, his eyes blazing with a strange light.

"That? Why, that is Jones himself if I'm not mistaken," answered Amos.

"No, that is not his real name," cried Bin; "his real name is Benedok; he is the half-breed—the man who murdered my parents years ago. Time has made some change in his appearance, but I would know him anywhere."

The carriage was within a few paces of them, when Jones drew rein, and stood up, taking a full survey of Amos.

"Ah! ha!" he exclaimed. "So I have found my runaway at last."

"And I have found mine," exclaimed the dwarf, in a deep, stern voice, striding in full view of Jones.

"Who are you?" cried Jones, but, even as he spoke, he turned deadly pale.

"You can remember me if you try, Benedok," answered Bin.

"What, is it possible?" gasped the affrighted Jones. "Is it possible I see—"

"Yes, you see him, and I have found you at last, murderer of my parents."

"What would you do?" cried Benedok, drawing a revolver.

But before he could raise it, Bin sent a bullet from his rifle through the body of the wretch, who, reeling, fell over the side of the carriage in the road, struggling in the agonies of death.

"My mission is accomplished, my vow fulfilled," said Bin, as he stood glaring down at his long-sought-for victim.

"Amos," said the dying man, as the boy advanced toward him to offer some water from a canteen, which he still carried, "I have a few words to say to you."

The boy gave him water, when, clutching his arm, the man gasped forth:

"Your—your—parents did not die, as I stated, when they came to my tavern years ago. They were rich people—they had money with them. I poisoned them and took the money. Look in my vest-pocket, and you will find there something—a silver cross, marked with initials, which may prove of service to you."

With these words Benedok fell back and expired.

Amos found the cross, and discovered a secret spring, which he pressed, when a steel slip flew back, on which was an ivory tablet, containing these words:

"If our son Amos should ever lose us, let him call on Robert Emerson, — st, Cincinnati."

Before night the body of Jones, or rather Benedok, as he must now be called, was conveyed to the nearest village, where Bin described what he had done.

Fortunately a traveler, passing at the time, not far distant, had seen the whole affair, and proved that Bin had only acted in self-defense.

A coroner's inquest was held next day, after which the body was buried.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

Before night Amos had started for Cincinnati, with Coral and her brother, whom he had begged to accompany him.

On arriving at their destination, Amos at once repaired to a lapidary with his bag of precious stones. The man examined them, and to the surprise and dismay of his auditors, especially of Amos, stated that they were not diamonds, although they were precious stones, worth altogether about twenty-five dollars or thereabouts.

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it," exclaimed Bin, when they left the place, "as I was always told that those were diamonds, although I thought it strange they should be so plentifully scattered about."

"I can't believe it yet," said Amos, tears of disappointment filling his eyes. "We will go to some other lapidary."

So they went to three or four lapidaries, but all pronounced the same judgment as the first upon the precious stones.

"All my trouble for nothing!" cried Amos, flinging down his bag in despair. "I'm not, after all, much better off than I was before."

A soft hand fell on his arm, a pair of gentle eyes looked into his face.

"Do not despair," said the voice of Coral. "What great matter after all."

Amos was cheered by the sweet girl's words.

"You can always have a home with us," added Bin; "do not think any more of your disappointment."

"You are indeed good friends to me," said Amos.

"And will you come and live with us?" cried Bin, joyfully.

"Why not stay here in the city?" inquired Amos, "here we may find plenty of employment."

"True," answered Bin, "but my vocation is in the prairie and the forest, to which I have become attached by habit, and where I shall return as soon as possible."

Happening to look down, Amos at that moment caught sight of the end of the silver cross, protruding from his pocket, when he remembered the principal errand which had brought him to this city.

Without loss of time, leaving his friends, he repaired to the address named, which proved to be the office of a well-known lawyer.

Amos, to his surprise, then learned that he was heir to a Cincinnati estate valued at over a million.

The lawyer took down the story the boy had been told by his former employer, Jones, and after several weeks spent in investigating the matter, the lad's claim to the property was proved beyond a doubt.

There is little to add. Amos' friends, Coral and Bin, were astonished to learn of his good fortune.

"After all," said the dwarf, laughing, "you have not lost much by that bag of precious stones."

"No, indeed," answered Amos. "And it seems as if my good fortune has come just in time to console me."

Amos now succeeded in persuading Bin to permit his sister to live with him in the mansion he was soon to occupy. He would procure a governess, and educate her in all those accomplishments that adorn her sex. As to Bin himself, nothing could prevail upon him to leave the wild life to which he had so long been accustomed.

* * * * *

Years passed. Coral had profited well by her teachers, and had become as accomplished as she was good and beautiful. An elegant, handsome woman, she was well fitted to become the wife of a good man.

They occupy a pleasant home in Cincinnati, and Bin Bunk lives with them.

The dwarf would never, however, have consented to forego his wild life but for a severe wound, received during one of his encounters with Indians on the plains, a spear having penetrated his side. He was saved by the party of whites with whom he was at the time, and by them conveyed to the nearest fort, where his life was for a time despaired of.

His strong constitution, however, eventually triumphed, and he recovered, but he was unfit to any longer handle rifle or dagger.

The fact grieved him beyond expression, but he is gradually becoming reconciled, among the comforts of his new home, and in the society of his sweet sister, Coral, who proves indeed an angel of consolation.

"I really believe," he said one day to Amos, "that I am looking back every day with less regret to my old wild life."

"I am glad to hear it," answered the young man. "I should think you had had enough of that kind of thing to satisfy you."

"Well," answered Bin, "once it did not seem to me as if I ever should have, but I believe I am getting reconciled to it."

They were now joined by Coral.

"You are looking well," said Bin. "I believe city life agrees with you, at all events."

"Any life would agree with me, with the person I loved," answered Coral, blushing, and glancing at Amos.

"Well, I believe it would," said Bin, "for you bloomed and thrived like a rose out there with me on the prairies, and I believe you would do the same were you there with your husband now."

"I do not think I will give her the chance to try," said Amos, shrugging his shoulders. "For my part, I had enough of it, and am content, for the future, to let those fabulous stories of precious stones and diamond fields go by me on the idle wings of the wind."

[THE END.]

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